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## CHAPTER 6 FRANK CAWS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF WORK WITH BOYS IN SUNDERLAND

*Jean Spence*

**I**N EARLY 2001, in its centenary year, the Lambton Street Fellowship Centre, an activities-based youth and community organisation, sited on the border of the town centre and the East End of Sunderland, was closed. Re-development and regeneration have claimed its premises and it will eventually relocate to a new building to the west of the town centre. There is no valid reason why the centre should remain in Lambton Street other than the romance of history and tradition because the shipyards, small shops and teeming tenements which once surrounded it have all vanished but the move will mark a significant break with its past.

The story is told that the Lambton Street Club began as an idea on a cold evening in the winter of 1901 when Frank Caws, a local architect, found a 9-year-old boy, a barefoot and ragged match seller, sheltering on the stairs of his office. Caws apparently determined there and then to do something about the plight of waifs and street vendors in the town (Smith, 1952; *Sunderland Echo*, 19/4/34; 26/4/75). He solicited the support of his professional friends, created a list of subscribers and organised a town meeting to persuade concerned men and women to give their time and energy to creating, managing and running a Boys' Club for waifs and street vendors. In December 1901, after the all male Executive Committee and a supporting Ladies Committee had been constituted, Caws secured suitable premises at 15 Lambton Street and the Sunderland Waifs' Rescue Agency and Street Vendors' Club formally opened its doors there on 2 January 1902.

From its inception until his sudden death, 8 April 1905, Frank Caws occupied the powerful position of Honorary Secretary and his influence significantly affected the tone of the work. The club's survival for a century cannot, of course, be attributed solely to his actions and ideas but the evidence suggests that the way in which Caws worked with the committee members, local politicians and employers, and most importantly, the boys and their families, was a key factor in setting it on a secure foundation. The human warmth of Caws in interpersonal relationships was crucial, but significantly, this was complemented by intellectual curiosity, organisational understanding and a willingness to



intervene practically and purposively in response to real circumstances. The agency which he founded from an apparently simple idea, embodied in practice a complex awareness of the social, political and religious concerns of the period and it was perhaps this more than anything which afforded it success.

### THE FOUNDING NARRATIVE

The simplicity of the founding story is representative of the ability of Frank Caws to communicate and appeal across a range of interests and emotions. Today that story is told by everyone who claims to know anything about the history of the Lambton Street Fellowship Centre, as the explanation for its existence. The story makes of Frank Caws and the waif, a boy called Thomas Auld, two easily understood stereotypes of their historical period. These stereotypes obliterate the real people but at the same time they signify the intentions and meanings which not only motivated Caws and his contemporaries but continued to motivate their successors.

Anyone familiar with the biography of Barnardo, will undoubtedly recognise the similarity within the founding narratives. In Barnardo's case, the chance encounter with a homeless waif in London, Jim Jarvis, also led to the creation of an organisation which has lasted (Wagner, 1979). The similarity is hardly accidental. The minutes of the Sunderland Waifs' Rescue Agency and Street Vendors' Club indicate that Barnardo's work had some influence not only upon Caws but also upon other members of the first Committee. It seems that from a very early stage the Committee sought a collaborative working relationship with Barnardo's organisation. For example:

*A letter from the Charity Organisation Society's official to Mrs Scurfield about the McMann family was read. The Secretaries were instructed to write Mrs Scurfield that the Committee consider the two little McMann boys fit subjects for removal to Dr Barnardo's Institution if Mrs Scurfield can obtain the requisite consent of the parents. (minutes, 20/2/02)*

Requisite consent was not granted in this case but at least one disabled boy from Sunderland, Robert Foxall, was sent through the auspices of Lambton Street to Barnardo's home in Stepney in order to learn a trade as a tailor (minutes, 4/9/02; 25/9/02; 9/10/02). When Barnardo died in September 1905 the Lambton Street Committee sent a letter of condolence to the Chairman of the Council of Barnardo's Homes (minutes, 21/9/05).

Barnardo's story offered a model that would have appealed to Caws who was constantly reflecting upon life's purpose and seeking practical application for his faith. The themes of rescue and rehabilitation through training embedded in Barnardo's work offered a moral framework within which the poor could be helped with the hope of long-term improvement. The recognisable form of the founding story as told by Caws thus provided a metaphor for his intentions and a means whereby the support of the respectable citizenry of Sunderland could be mobilised. The power of the Barnardo connection re-emerged later in Lambton Street when the managers used a variation of the famous 'Before and After' photographs (Wagner, 1979, illus. 7) in their Annual Report, publishing pictures of the match seller as



found by Frank Caws and of the young man aged 22 (minute, 3/12/14). Having been 'saved' by Caws, Thomas Auld had been 'trained' and had become a successful engineer in London. These pictures were used to publicise the Lambton Street work for many years.

As the principle actor in the creation of the club, Caws represents the ideal citizen. This is a stereotype but it is not only this, because in the construction of his own life, Caws seems to have made a self-conscious effort to live according to what he believed an ideal citizen might be. Lambton Street may have been the culmination of his ideals and an obituary suggests 'that his heart and soul were with the little waifs and strays of our town' (*Sunderland Daily Post*, 14/4/05). It was this work in particular which provided him with the means to reconcile his powerful individualism with his social conscience through the application of his religious and political principles. Placing himself at the centre of the story, comparing himself with Barnardo, situated him as 'Club Father', a position carrying implicit power and suggesting unassailable though benign authority. Occupying such a role whilst working democratically within the committee structure, helping 'innocent' children whilst accepting the intervention of the Charity Organisation Society enabled him to manoeuvre around some of the restricting conventions of charitable activity.

This undoubtedly suited his anti-bureaucratic leanings. His elevated status enabled him to take a lead not so much in the detailed decision making, but in the sympathetic spirit which informed it. Although he sometimes took an uncompromising minority position, accepting majority decisions with less than good grace, he was able to do so without losing personal support and seems to have found his own means of working around that which he did not like. There is some allusion to this in an 'Appreciation' published after his death:

*If at times he appeared to have a special way of his own in dealing with administrative details, which some of his colleagues might think not quite en regle, they knew well that it was simply the exuberance of his deep sympathy running ahead of his usual precaution. He had a strong AVERSION TO RED TAPE. He was peculiarly sensitive regarding rules and regulations – if too hard and fast; he chafed against official checks and bars – not per se but with a fear that they might hinder rather than help forward the movement at heart. But his intimates knew well that these interesting little foibles were only on the surface, and that none appreciated more than he did their cooperation towards the common end. (*Sunderland Daily Post*, 14/4/05)*

The culture of the Lambton Street Club in its earliest days was to a large degree a reflection of the personal intentions of Frank Caws. Had he lived, it is possible that his power would have been curbed and there is evidence of this process beginning in the months immediately prior to his death, during which he was both forced to conform to new rules adopted regarding the distribution of second hand clothing and to accept the employment of a paid resident superintendent. As it was, the new superintendent, Jim Smith, was influenced by the sympathetic approach which Caws demonstrated in his dealings with the boys and adopted a similar means of working. Meanwhile the untimely death of Caws marginalised these disputes in the elevation and veneration of the deceased man as Father of the Club, saviour of boys. In the telling and retelling of the story he had created, his name and his image have lingered without blemish. Without the founding narrative and the longevity of the Lambton Street Club, the

contribution of Frank Caws to the development of social and welfare work in Sunderland might have been forgotten. As it is, this aspect of his work in the town provides a useful point of departure for the discovery of an individual whose efforts were both expressive of the historical period and unique to the character of the man and the place in which he lived.

### CAWS AND SUNDERLAND

In a remembrance album which his daughter Mabel compiled after his death, an intimate picture of Frank Caws is revealed both as he appeared to his contemporaries and through fragments of his own writings, sketches and designs (Album, ud.). He seems to have won the affection and admiration of all those with whom he had close contact. His brother Luther suggested that 'Frank had an extraordinary power of attracting and attaching in loyalty to his person almost every soul that touched his' (Album) and time and again in the letters of condolence to his wife and family, there are references to the man's selflessness. For example:

*He was so true, his character so beautiful and unselfish and his nature so sweet that to know him was to admire and love him. (Alex Cameron, 9/4/05, Caws album)*

Caws was a skilled and gifted architect. He was also an artist, poet, engineer, mathematician and inventor. He was an active member of Sunderland's religious, political and cultural life since the time of his arrival in 1867. By 1901 when the Lambton Street Club was founded, he already had a history of involvement and experience in voluntary social and welfare work. His death was probably hastened by the fact that, disregarding a 'chill', he had travelled to London to meet the Ecclesiastical Commissioners to try to persuade them to stop digging sand from Roker beach at the mouth of the Wear. On his return the chill became the pneumonia which killed him (Newspaper cutting, unattributed, Album). There is no information about why he was worried about the removal of sand, but his determination suggests a man committed to the wellbeing of his adopted town.

On his death, it was claimed that:

*Frank Caws, with HIS SPLENDID ABILITIES was fitted for a larger sphere – a metropolitan centre, where his versatile genius would have had more scope and his artistic powers an ampler opportunity. (Sunderland Daily Post, 14/4/05)*

Reinforcing this, in a letter to the family, G. Northover from the Royal Institute of British Architects, wrote:

*It had often occurred to me that London was Mr Caws' proper sphere. From the point of view of worldly advancement his wonderful genius would have carried him far. (Northover, 1905, Album)*

Perhaps the same could have been said of his voluntary work; the poorer areas of London could have benefited greatly from his energy and dedication. In London, certainly by the 1880s, Caws could have established himself as an architect, and made a name for himself among the little army of middle-class social reformers and workers

creating the framework of the social services which were to blossom in the twentieth century. Under these conditions he was less likely to have been ignored by history with his 'great power and attainment ... unfortunately practically unrecognised and unknown' (Arthur A. Haver, M.I.M.A., Album).

However, the evidence from his life suggests that a town like Sunderland was a much more congenial environment for an individual who liked to know that he was making a difference rather than that he was making money or becoming famous. As a developing town with a wealthy middle class focused around shipbuilding interests, Sunderland offered scope for Caws as an architect and inventive engineer to think on the grand scale. He narrowly, and he argued unfairly, missed the commission for the new Town Hall in 1874 (*The British Architect*, 26/7/1874; 3/7/1874). Despite this he made a visible impact upon the late Victorian townscape, designing substantial department stores, housing estates, churches, and individual residences for wealthy clients (Album; Potts, ud.). After a devastating fire in Sunderland in 1878, he invented fireproof concrete flooring, (Caws, 1886a; 1886b; 1899) and in shipbuilding circles he was most famed for having invented a model which could help calculate the most efficient design for maximising a ship's speed (Caws, 1894; Caws Album). His regional influence was developed through his interest in shipbuilding as much as architecture, and the friendship he enjoyed with G. B. Hunter, the Wallsend shipbuilder and native of Sunderland, lasted into the next generation. For the Swan Hunter shipyard, Caws designed the massive sheds in which the *Mauritania* was constructed.

Less ambitiously he was also the architect for the Wallsend Cafe, a social centre owned by Mrs Hunter. The cafe, opened in 1883 as a 'New Coffee Palace' (*Shields Daily News*, 20/12/1883), survives today as a community centre. It was designed as a non-alcoholic meeting place and as a social and educational centre for employees and associates of the Swan Hunter shipyard and became the base for the development of technical education for shipyard apprentices. It was the first building in Wallsend to be lit by electricity. On its refurbishment in 1959, the centre was described by the *Wallsend News* as 'an imaginative and inspired piece of planning for those early days', soon to be 'the centre-stone of local social activity' (21/8/1959). In the Wallsend Cafe there is a hint of the interconnectedness which was characteristic of Caws' approach to his life and work. Here his architectural and shipbuilding interests combined with his concern for technical education and social welfare.

His welfare interests were apparent from the start of his architectural career and possibly one of the first buildings for which he was responsible in Sunderland, as manager in the firm of Potts and Sons, was The Pottery Building in High Street East. This was commissioned by Edward Backhouse, a wealthy Sunderland philanthropist as 'a sort of religious and social centre in the poor area close to the docks' (Potts, ud.). Backhouse, as president of the YMCA, was probably also involved in the decision to award Caws the contract for the new Sunderland YMCA building in 1887.

No doubt, Frank Caws' decisions as a young man whilst embarking on his career were largely influenced by his professional aspirations and ambitions. However, he was a man whose ambitions were broad, and 'money making as a thing for its own sake he despised'



(Holding, 1905, Caws Album). In a condolence letter composed less than a year before his own death, Caws himself wrote:

*How DREADFUL is the gross materialism rampant in most people. How FEW noble soulful women and men! God's pearls are they of inestimable price.* (Caws, 1904, Album)

He was much more broadly concerned with human, cultural and spiritual matters and he was scrupulously honest in his business dealings. In his Presidential address to the Northern Architectural Association in 1901, he deplored 'the debasing influence' of 'gold' and the 'increasing disposition to bribe clients to employ us, by offering our services at rates of remuneration below the rates fixed by usage' (Caws, 1901, 463). One of his pupils, Waldo Guy wrote to his sister:

*I could say more of him as a master than any other pupil of an architect, for only the simple reason of his honesty in business.* (Waldo to Ethi: Album)

Although he lived relatively comfortably, Caws never accumulated wealth. Both his granddaughter and grandson mentioned in interview that their grandfather made very little money and T. H. Holding noted in his 'Reminiscence' that:

*Mr Caws had not a vestige of selfishness. Had he been a rich man he could not have been selfish, but as he was probably never a rich man he was still unselfish.* (Holding, 1905, Album).

According to his granddaughter, Frank Caws would sometimes forget to eat, he was so busy thinking, (Interview with Mrs Elaine Amundsen, Jan 1999) whilst his grandson said independently:

*He was a talented old man. They used to say that when he went for dinner he would sometimes start on the soup with his knife and fork. He was miles away.* (Interview with Frank Caws Junior, November, 1998)

Yet this dreaminess and lack of materialism was well compensated by the willingness of Caws to apply his ideas. His approach is well captured in an extract from a letter he wrote to S. Waller esq. who had developed an interest in astronomy:

*Below the moon the same dynamics rule as above: and if we can understand the movement of sugar bubbles in a tea cup we can understand the movements of the worlds in the sky.* (Album)

Here was an eminently practical man and Sunderland provided the scope for his dreams to be translated into action in a variety ways.

During the nineteenth century, the town was still small enough to enable an energetic and talented man to become significant and Frank Caws made contacts and friendships across class, professional and religious boundaries. His links with the wealthy, with local politicians and with other professional and business people were facilitated by architectural and engineering enterprises. As a practising Christian with ecumenical leanings he also befriended the ministers of various churches. His own Independent Methodist background enabled him to identify particularly easily with Nonconformists, amongst whom numbered some of Sunderland's most active and philanthropically

minded citizens, including the Backhouse family who were members of the Society of Friends.

Described as 'a poet of no mean order' (Brown, 1905, Album) Caws participated happily in the cultural life of the town and those who listened to his poetic renditions seem to have been deeply affected by him:

*An evening with your father was like a night with the gods ... We have never forgotten his rendition of Banks's poem on Tettenhall Churchyard or the satire on the Wolverhampton architect whom his draughtsmen fought (ideally) with T-squares!* (Edmunds, 1906, Album)<sup>(1)</sup>

*I recall a delightful evening spent in listening to him discoursing on 'A Poem I Love' to a debating society in this district. The man was transfigured as he read to a rapt audience Tennyson's story of the quest for the Holy Grail, stopping now and again to elucidate this or that passage in simple but lofty and informing words.* (Newspaper cutting, unattributed, Album)<sup>(2)</sup>

Caws thus established himself as a popular participant in a dynamic and optimistic industrial town. He was also politically influential, supporting local politicians with broadly liberal sympathies, including his friend G. B. Hunter who stood, unsuccessfully, as the Liberal candidate for Sunderland in 1900 (*Sunderland Daily Echo*, 10/4/05) and Cllr. Summerbell, a member of the Lambton Street Committee who was elected candidate for the Labour Representation Committee in 1904 (*Sunderland Daily Echo*, 26/2/04, 3). Caws himself was a lay member on the Technical Education Committee in 1901 and representatives from Lambton Street dealt directly with councillors in matters relating to their work with boys. Yet Caws accomplished political participation without engaging in formal party politics for which he had little taste. This, like his ecumenicism, was an important aspect both of his ability to win wide support, and at the same time allowed him the freedom to transgress the limitations of conventional and bureaucratic boundaries in his various projects.

## THE SUNDERLAND YMCA

When Caws arrived in Sunderland in 1867 at the age of 21 he was part of the massive growth in population experienced by the town in the nineteenth century. Sunderland's shipbuilding, mining and related heavy engineering and manufacturing concerns demanded a large and responsive labour force. Many of those who migrated to Sunderland during the century were unskilled labourers who settled near to the source of casual employment along the riverbanks and towards the docks in the East End. This was the old town centre whose once grand residences were rapidly tuned into houses of multiple occupancy as the more skilled workers and the wealthier inhabitants moved west and south. The pattern of settlement was very similar to that identified in the East End of London (Stedman Jones, 1971) and was no doubt typical of industrial towns elsewhere.

As an architect, Frank Caws must have been intimately aware of the pressure upon accommodation, of the overcrowding and deteriorating housing in old Sunderland. On arrival he lived and worked on the fringes of the East End and in the commission for the Pottery Buildings the social and welfare needs of the area were a central concern. Later in his life, it was from these streets that he was to draw the boys who became members of the Waifs' Rescue Agency and Street Vendors' Club. The evidence suggests that Caws 'was always on the side of the oppressed' (Holding, 1905) but as a young man, it was the welfare of those like himself who were his main concern.

As well as the labouring poor, newcomers to the town included those who were needed to provide its institutional infrastructure. Often those attracted to growing towns were newly qualified professional young men, and it was for the benefit of such young men that the YMCA had been founded in 1844 (Binfield, 1973). The involvement of Caws in social and welfare work began with the founding of the YMCA in Sunderland in November 1871.

It is quite possible that Caws had experienced the benefits of the YMCA during his five year apprenticeship in Ryde in the Isle of Wight, the YMCA building there being only a five minute walk away from the offices of the architect Thomas Hellyer with whom he served his time. It is more than likely that a young man of his religious convictions would have made full use of the facilities and opportunities offered by the organisation. He might also have benefited from membership during the five months in the early 1860s he spent at Kensington Art College in London or during the short time as a single young man that he lived and worked in Darlington and Wolverhampton before settling in Sunderland.

Certainly without some previous experience of the organisation it is unlikely that he would have been able to take such initiative in its founding and then inhabit the role of first Honorary Secretary in Sunderland, a position which he later shared with a Mr Bowes. In that capacity Caws was a central figure in the new association:

*Messrs Caws and Bowes, were certainly the pillars of the Association in its early days, and by their genial manner and brotherly kindness WON MANY A YOUNG MAN to the Association and to become a follower of Christ. (Thompson, 1894, Vol. II)*

Participation in the life of the YMCA brought Caws into close contact with mission work with boys in the East End (Thompson 1894: III) and with the popular ideas which were influencing voluntary social and youth work at the time. One of these ideas was that of 'Muscular Christianity', and T. H. Holding who was the first Chairman of Sunderland's YMCA and founder of the Sunderland Cycling Club, remembered:

*I was asked to lecture and I selected as subject at the YMCA 'Muscular Christianity'. At the close of this lecture, after having alluded to canoeing amongst other departments of Muscular Christianity ... Mr Caws came to me quite excited and interested for he had done canoeing in the Isle of Wight. So fired was he that he suggested what a good thing if he could have a good big canoe and share it between us to work on the Wear and coast around Sunderland. I simply said 'Done' and I at once purchased a canoe, supposed to be in shares, but the canoe was really my own from the first ... But I was proud to give Mr Caws a paddle in it before I had*



*one myself. He trundled it up to Lambton Castle and back on a tide and enjoyed it immensely ... starting with that one canoe which was purchased really through Mr Frank Caws, it will be recollected that they very soon got into 12 or 13 at Sunderland.* (Holding, 1905, Album)

During his time as Honorary Secretary, the YMCA in Sunderland grew from an organisation concerned narrowly with missionary work and religious education to one which embraced a growing range of secular and cultural interests. Canoeing on the river must have been only one aspect of this. By 1874, secular educational classes under the Society of Arts, French and German classes and a Literary and Mutual Improvement Class were added to the programme (Thompson, 1894, IV).

Although he was always keen to broaden the canvas, the religious inspiration behind Caws' activity was ever present. He helped organise the visit to Sunderland of the then famous American YMCA evangelists Moody and Sankey during their first mission to Britain in 1873 (Album; Pollock, 1963) and subsequent to this he acted as personal host to Professor Henry Drummond, an evangelical follower of Moody, when he gave a course of lectures in the town and 'hundreds of young men were brought to a decision for Christ' (Thompson, 1894, III).

Frank Caws and Mr Bowes resigned from the position of Honorary Joint Secretary in 1875. Originally the YMCA in Sunderland was run entirely by volunteers espousing the ideals of association and collectivity. However, because of the expansion of its work it was eventually mooted that a paid Secretary should be employed and some acrimonious debate ensued.

*A good deal of unpleasantness was caused by this appointment, and it was only by the skilful management of some of the older members that more disastrous consequences were avoided.* (Thompson, 1894, IV)

The position of Caws in this matter in the YMCA debate is unclear, but when a similar situation emerged in Lambton Street, it is clear from the minutes that Caws was a firm believer in voluntary action, resisting unsuccessfully, the employment of a professional worker (minutes, 24/1/1902).

It is possible that the dispute provided Caws with an excuse to gradually withdraw from the everyday affairs of the YMCA. The same period saw growing responsibility in his personal life and the start of intense activity in his business. He married Helen Riddett, also of the Isle of Wight, about the time of his moving to Sunderland, and by 1883, he was father to four daughters and a son. In 1874 he had submitted his designs for the competition to build Sunderland's new Town Hall and the ensuing controversy when he came first but failed to win the commission because of a dispute over costs, rumbled on until at least the end of 1876 (*The British Architect*, 1874a; 1874b). This fiasco, occurring at the same time as the debate about the secretaryship in the YMCA, seems to have done little for his personal reputation, (*The Alderman*, 1876) revealing the depth of his impatience with bureaucracies.

However, he eventually regained his composure, accepted defeat in the matter of the

Town Hall and maintained a less central position as an Executive member of the YMCA. Shortly thereafter in 1878, he went on to design his most famous monument, the pier at Sea View, his home village on the Isle of Wight. During the 1880s he seems to have been creatively absorbed in designing and inventing. After his death, it was claimed that during this period he invented a phonogram, 'which was in principle essentially the same as Edison's later invention' but that he had not found the time to patent it (Thompson, 1905). He was also during this period discussing the affairs of the world, childcare theories, and the practical possibilities of his inventions with his friends (Holding, 1905), writing poetry, drawing and painting and reflecting upon religious questions and the purpose of life (Album). There could have been little time for social work or the YMCA.

He maintained contact with the YMCA until the end of his life. The announcement of his death in the local YMCA journal notes:

*... only a short time before he died, members of the Naval architecture class visited his office in a quest for information re. his clever invention for testing the speed of ships. (YMCA Flashes, May 1905)*

Nevertheless, he gradually withdrew from active engagement and it was only in the 1890s, when as a member of RIBA, his professional reputation was established, and his family was growing, that he re-emerged into the world of philanthropy and social work.

## THE SOCIAL CENTRE

There is evidence to suggest Caws' idea of starting a club for waifs in Sunderland was precipitated by his participation in, and admiration for, the work of The Rev.

G. H. R. Garcia, a native of Southampton, who arrived in Sunderland in April 1893 to become minister of the local Union Congregational Church. This church was sited in a 'respectable' working-class area populated primarily, but not exclusively, by skilled artisans but by September 1894, the YMCA magazine reported that Garcia's ministry extended well beyond the confines of his church and that he:

*had already shown his great interest in the social questions of the hour and the problem of the children of our slums by starting a Home for Waifs and Strays in Whitehall Terrace. Already six children have been provided with a good home, where they will be looked after, educated, and trained for a useful position in life. (YMCA Flashes, 1894).*

Garcia, who graduated from St John's College, Cambridge in 1892 had experience of settlement work in London and was interested in Christian Socialism. In a talk on that subject to the Free Church Federal Council in 1903, 'He stressed the need to rid people of the slums, and to use the corporate resources of the wider community to do so' (Hawkins, 1903). His enthusiasm for charitable work led him within a short time to become Honorary Secretary of Sunderland's Charity Organisation Society and during the ten years of his ministry in Sunderland he attempted to demonstrate through social activity what a practical, living Christianity might be. Garcia's most notable achievement was the development of a thriving social centre near his church which seems to have been modelled on the lines of a settlement.

The ecumenical and practical Christianity espoused by Garcia mirrored that of Frank Caws and both men were motivated in their everyday actions by a deep and unshakeable faith. It was perhaps inevitable that they found common cause and in the obituaries it is noted that Caws was 'a co-worker with the late Mr Garcia at the Social Centre' (*Sunderland Daily Post*, 1905). 'One of the architects and principle organisers of the social centre instituted by the late Rev. G. H. R. Garcia' (Album).

The extent of Caws' involvement in the social centre is difficult to ascertain. However, it is recorded that he took responsibility for a young men's Bible Class there and remained engaged in this activity at the time of his death (*Sunderland Daily Post*, 1905, Album). It was in the social centre that Caws first met Jim Smith who was to become the resident Superintendent in Lambton Street (remaining in that post for over 50 years). Smith, who was a member of Garcia's Union Congregationalist church, began his career as a youth worker there and for some time was assisting voluntarily in both the social centre and Lambton Street.

Caws admired Garcia sufficiently to take some responsibility in working towards the establishment of a memorial after the minister's early death in 1904 (Rees, 1905) and in the institution of the Lambton Street Club, he might have been attempting to extend the work with 'waifs and strays' which Garcia had started. Possibly the Waifs' Rescue Agency and Street Vendors' Club, which became known locally as 'The Waifs and Strays' owed as much in the practical reality of its development to the influence of the Rev. G. H. R. Garcia as it did to the more distant, populist example of Barnardo.

## **THE WAIFS' RESCUE AGENCY AND STREET VENDORS' CLUB**

By the time Caws began the Lambton Street enterprise, his youngest child was 17-years-old, and his reputation in the town unassailable. He might not have built the Town Hall but had erected the imposing structure of terracotta directly opposite where he had his offices. His physical mark was stamped on some of the most significant buildings in the new Sunderland Centre. He had contributed to the success of shipbuilding through his engineering and inventions and he was making a contribution to the civic life of the town through his cultural and educational activities. In the year in which the Waifs' Rescue Agency was conceived, Caws sat as a lay member of the Technical Education Committee which coordinated the provision of further and higher education in the borough and prepared the ground for the implementation of the 1902 Education Act. This Committee was responsible for developing the technical college which was later to become Sunderland University (Sunderland Borough Council, 1901-2). Caws was not only well known locally, but well loved and respected by his contemporaries. His opinions and ideas mattered.

As a practical man with strongly held religious principles and a social conscience it is hardly surprising that he was moved by the plight of poor children in the town. He was not alone in his concerns. By the end of the nineteenth century, the condition of Britain's poorest children in industrial towns and cities was becoming something of a national



scandal and provoking a wide range of independent initiatives. These included clubs for boys and girls, holiday schemes, residential homes and orphanages, apprenticeship schemes and emigration societies. Common to most, as exemplified by Barnardo, was the idea that the children of the unskilled working classes could only be saved from destitution if they could be shown the possibilities of inhabiting a different sort of world. If they could be taught habits of cleanliness, thrift and self-discipline and most importantly, if they learned a trade capable of giving them the means to secure respectable employment.

Many of these ideas seem to have been integrated into the Lambton Street undertaking. In particular, perhaps reflecting his immediate involvement in technical educational policy, Caws seems to have been convinced of the importance of training boys for 'respectable' employment and this was at the heart of his plans for the work in the East End. However, his vision was not precise and at the very start, a whole range of ideas were thrown into the ring regarding what the new club might do which were eventually modified through responsiveness to the real situation encountered. The clumsy name of 'The Sunderland Waifs' Rescue Agency and Street Vendors' Club' is indicative of this initial lack of precision (minute, 23/12/1901).

There was some attempt to acknowledge the possibility of developing a 'shelter' for homeless waifs, in direct imitation of Barnardo (Newspaper cutting: unattributed, minutes, Jan 1902). However, Sunderland was not like London; here the problem was not so much homelessness amongst poor children, but one of poverty and the difficulties of living in overcrowded tenements. Besides, only a very short distance from the Lambton Street Club, The Sunderland Orphanage catered for such boys. Only three cases are recorded in the minutes of homeless boys making contact with Lambton Street. One was helped to find a job and lodgings in a local mining village. Another was provided with a bed in the Superintendent's house for a week and fed at the expense of the club, only to move on and disappear to another town, and the final case was referred on to another agency.

Another idea which was discussed and partially developed, emerging from the Barnardo influence, was that of emigration. What happened to that can be ascertained from the following extract:

*Mr Caws reported that the previous Sunday night's gathering was more thinly attended than on the first and second Sunday nights: and that it seemed a rumour that the boys were all to be sent to Canada had kept many away. (minute, 13/3/1902)*

Needless to say, the idea of emigrating boys was abandoned at a very early stage and in any case, it did not really fit with the ethos of the club as it was developing.

The Lambton Street Agency flourished primarily as a social club for local boys, many of whom, but not all were street vendors. It was a place where boys could meet at leisure, participate in activities and games and also find advice, support and the opportunity for informal education. Here they could gain some respite from the rigours of home and street life whilst coming under the influence of steady, responsible male citizens who might serve as role models. In the early minutes of the club, it is apparent that this was

the type of work that was uppermost in the mind of most of the original Committee members. Consequently it is tempting to ask for whose benefit the 'Waifs' Rescue' was inserted in the title or whether this was simply a playing out of the founding narrative to which all members tacitly assented.

Caws was an active participant in the everyday work of the club. He spared no energy in his concern for its young members:

*He welcomed any suggestion that might work for their benefit; nothing was a trouble that might minister to their well-being. (Sunderland Daily Post, 1905)*

He made arrangements to meet boys outside of club hours to help fit them out with second-hand clothes and – not always successfully because the boys were notoriously unreliable – to take them to meet potential employers. He encouraged friends, family, colleagues and business associates to help out on regular club evenings and at special events and he persistently lobbied employers to provide opportunities and openings for the boys from Lambton Street – again not always successfully – the employers too were notoriously unreliable (Spence, 2001).

The everyday work of the Lambton Street Club was primarily dictated by the physical needs and leisure interests of the members, but the underlying purpose and the one which moved Caws particularly, was that the club should provide an opportunity whereby these boys might improve their life chances. It was this central idea around which other activities were organised. Insofar as it was possible, the boys were to be taught attitudes and habits that would encourage them away from casual labour, and towards seeking opportunities for training for regular employment when they reached school-leaving age. Where their circumstances militated against this, the work of the club was to intervene where possible. This might require giving attention to the private life of an individual child. More broadly, it involved political campaigning and lobbying, particularly in relation to the regulation of street trading amongst children and on matters of juvenile justice.

Caws' advocacy of technical education and apprenticeship as a firm foundation for a settled and satisfactory adult life was, to some degree, based upon his own apparently positive experiences of apprenticeship, both as pupil and master. His practical leanings also encouraged him towards a belief in the virtue of practical skill as well as to an understanding that without regular work and a regular income, individuals had little hope of developing personal enthusiasms. However, his was not a narrow advocacy of technical skill. His own cultural and spiritual enthusiasms created in him a desire to communicate such pleasures to those in less favourable circumstances and the range of activity which he sponsored in Lambton Street included drama, music, 'gramophone entertainment' and lectures upon matters of broad interest as well as bagatelle and football. Caws organised an ecumenical Sunday Service in Lambton Street as well as participating in the weekday activities. He also gave occasional lectures:

*I recollect that once when Frank Caws was illustrating his talk on the eclipse of the sun, with the aid of two china plates, the clang of the fire-engine bell broke the quietude of the meeting. Instantly there was turmoil in that room. 'Howay lads, it's a fire', they yelled, and within a minute not a boy was left. Very soon, however, they*

*were trooping back to their seats. 'It's only a false alarm', they said, and meekly Frank Caws continued his demonstration of the eclipse. (Smith, undated)*

In his work in establishing the Lambton Street Club in the last years of his life, Frank Caws revealed something of the quality of his individual abilities. At the same time, his legacy stands as something of an example in the field of community and youth work. His maturity and experience and his social standing in Sunderland in 1901 were important factors in facilitating the creation of a project such as this. The application of his broad cultural, political and educational interests were equally important in fostering success in the development of the enterprise. Behind everything lay his enduring personal Christian faith. It was this that was the well spring of all his endeavours, and guided his interventions in the field of social and welfare work.

### CHRISTIANITY

Many of the contemporaries of Frank Caws who involved themselves in social and welfare work were motivated primarily by evangelicism, and this was an aspect of his own involvement in the YMCA as a young man. However, Caws had no desire to preach to the poor. For him spiritual matters were integral to the whole person and included material and cultural life. Nevertheless, he remained evangelical and consistently sought to include religious activity and instruction in his voluntary work.

His Christianity was ever present and never hidden. He was deeply interested in spiritual matters, whether in asking himself the purpose of his own life: 'What can I be for?' (Album), or writing about the value of the Pentecostal Movement: 'We are thankful for the air we breathe normally. We know that tempests are necessary. But we are glad they are intermittent and infrequent' (Album). A short poem written in 1903 captures to some degree his spiritual quest:

Going forth  
On Life's great sea  
Unknowing what  
Her fate may be  
God in the winds  
That around her blow  
God in the tides  
That move below  
And is it our own Life  
Even so?

It would do Frank Caws a disservice to deny that his faith lay behind all his projects, behind both the public and the private man, and it is this very integration of the private and public self which perhaps in the end provides the clue to his success. He was sincere and he was honest towards himself and others. He did not play games in order to achieve the ends which he desired and he acted with integrity in his dealings with everyone, no matter what their social status or their relationship towards him. The relevance of these qualities cannot be underestimated in the manner in which he approached social, community and youth work.



## SUMMARY

In order to understand Frank Caws and his voluntary work, it is necessary to approach him through the duality of his public and private faces. We have been left with the public face mainly in the formal records, particularly in the minutes of the Waifs' Rescue Agency and they require active reading and interpretation in order to locate the sentiments of the man who wrote them. The private face is bequeathed to us mainly through the contents of the family album and these, being a memorial token, are in the main, valedictory. What is finally revealed is a charismatic, reflective individual who was dearly loved but not always easy to handle. He carried weight and influence in his adopted town. That he chose to use this for the benefit of others rather than himself or his own family was what, in the end, made people admire and respect him, forgiving him his lack of patience with mundane bureaucratic matters, or what he considered obstructive systems. One of the Lambton Street committee members wrote to the Caws family:

*No man whom I have ever met ever commanded from me a greater tribute of affectionate regard. As a citizen, he was one of those the town can least afford to lose. As a personal friend, innumerable men, women and children will share with you in a very real sense, his loss, whose place will always be vacant. The memory of such a life – spent in a measure quite unique in my experience – for the good of others, will be one that those of us who have been privileged to live close to him will ever cherish as a sacred and uplifting inspiration. (Perris, 1905)*

Frank Caws worked self-consciously to construct himself within the terms of his own religious ideals. This idealism motivated him to use his intelligence and practical skill to work to improve the conditions of his world. He achieved such improvement with reference to the conventions and boundaries of the society within which he lived but his approach was informed and critical. He never refrained from educating himself or from asking questions and he worked within his historical constraints with consummate skill. He summed up his own approach in a letter to S. Waller (ud.):

*The nature of my own intellect is essentially enterprising and progressive so that I find less pleasure in storing my mind with mere facts, facts already known and recognised, than in pursuing less beaten paths in the hope of discovering something strange and new ... Sidney, I say to you, learn all you can from man. But rest not in what you have thus learned and may learn. Go out to inquire of Nature her very self. (Album)*

The minutes of the Lambton Street Club record his death with great shock and sorrow. Apart from representatives of the committee, 'eight cabs containing altogether 72 boys connected with the club' followed his coffin. 'Other boys followed on foot', (*Sunderland Daily Post*, 14/4/05) a distance of at least three miles from their homes. Perhaps his elevation to the status of 'father' of the Lambton Street Fellowship, romanticised in the story of its founding was, in the end, a fitting tribute to a man whose work might otherwise have been forgotten.

The Pottery buildings in the East End of Sunderland are no more. But the Wallsend Cafe and the social centre continue to provide a base for local Community Activities. The building where Caws discovered Thomas Auld remains standing but the 19th century Town Hall was demolished during redevelopment in the 1960s. The YMCA building

designed by Caws has long since vanished and the post-Albemarle version of the Lambton Street Club, the third building on the site, is in the process of removal. Yet the YMCA and the Fellowship continue to thrive and flourish. Both now include girls in their work. That Sunderland YMCA in 2001 is engaged in work with homeless young people near the town centre, whilst the Lambton Street Fellowship concentrates upon leisure activities is, perhaps, an irony of history. However, the survival of both organisations, and the influence of their work in Sunderland over the years is a fitting monument to Frank Caws and one he would have appreciated.

### NOTES

1. The satire about the Wolverhampton architect was probably composed by Frank Caws about himself. He had been for a while employed as an architect in that town.
2. Tennyson, 1809–92, lived on the Isle of Wight and it is possible that Frank Caws, who was born and raised there and later often visited his family there, heard the poet himself performing his work.

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